

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 21, 2017

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Congratulations on your confirmation as the Secretary of the Department of Commerce. We are pleased to have a fellow Gulf State resident heading a Department that is so important to our region.

As you know, commercial and recreational fishing in state and federal Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) waters is very important to the national and regional economy and the Gulf region's customs, cultures and traditions. Access to these fishing resources is vital for our communities.

In particular, the Gulf red snapper fishery is an economic powerhouse. According to a report released by the American Sportfishing Association, the recreational red snapper fishery alone supported upwards of 2,600 jobs and generated \$395 million in economic output in our region in 2011.¹ Despite such importance, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has used outdated and one-dimensional science to manage the red snapper fishery in federal waters. Specifically, the lack of real-time and use of state-generated data along with inadequate coordination with the Gulf states in general, has led us to believe that federal government is under-counting this fishery resource. The result has been a significantly reduced number of recreational fishing days in federal waters. As an example, there were 193 days in 2006² compared to eleven days last year.³

This declining trend is especially troubling as the Gulf red snapper fishery experienced an all-time high quota set at 14.3 million pounds for 2015.⁴ We believe that the federal government can take immediate administrative steps to help benefit red snapper recreational fishing opportunities as we continue to work with stakeholders on a long term solution. As such, we respectfully urge you to work towards the following:

- allow the Gulf States, through the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, to act as the entity responsible for providing the stock assessment for the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council for fisheries managed under the Reef Fish Plan;⁵
- direct NMFS – in conjunction with the Gulf States, the Gulf of Mexico Council, and the charter and recreational fishing sectors – to certify existing state programs⁶ such as LA creel, Mississippi's Tails n' Scales, and Alabama's Snapper Check;

¹ American Sportfishing Association: *The Economic Gains from Reallocating Specific Saltwater Fisheries*. May 12, 2015.

² Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council: *The History of Recreational Red Snapper Management*. February 16, 2012.

³ 81 FR 38110. June 13, 2016.

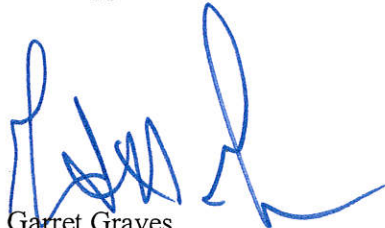
⁴ Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council: *Framework Action to the Fishery Management Plan for the Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf of Mexico including Environmental Assessment, Regulatory Impact Review, and Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis*. March 2015.

⁵ H.R. 1335, *Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act*, Section 18, introduced by Congressman Don Young on March 4, 2015.

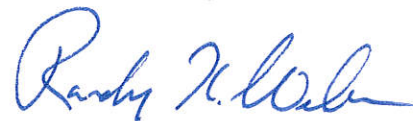
- reevaluate the counting of red snapper mortality that is a result of the removal of offshore oil rigs against the total allowable catch of that fish and from counting those fish toward the quota for U.S. fishermen for the purposes of closing the fishery when the quota has been reached;⁷ and
- direct NMFS to expand upon existing partnerships with states to develop best practices for implementing state recreational fisheries programs and to develop guidance that detail best practices for administering state programs.⁸

We welcome the opportunity to work with you on these initial administrative common sense reforms that would greatly improve the science and management of all species in the Gulf, including red snapper. We also respectfully urge you to use any and all means within your purview to ensure that our recreational anglers are afforded the maximum amount of time on the water for the 2017 federal recreational red snapper season.

Sincerely,



Garret Graves
Member of Congress



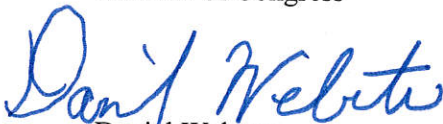
Randy Weber
Member of Congress



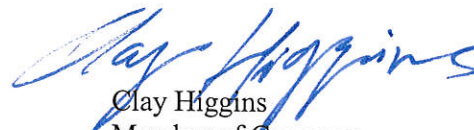
Bradley Byrne
Member of Congress



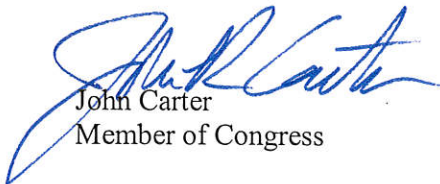
Steven Palazzo
Member of Congress



Daniel Webster
Member of Congress



Clay Higgins
Member of Congress



John Carter
Member of Congress



Mike Johnson
Member of Congress

⁶ Id. at 5, Sec. 13.

⁷ Id. at 5, Sec. 21.

⁸ Id. at 5, Sec. 17.